

The concept of asia pacific history essay



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1. In the Global politics, Asia Pacific is confronted with many challenges. It's a region in which the United States, China and Japan relate directly to one another. The United States is still a dominant power in the region, since post 1945 period, whereas, on an ambitious plan of economic modernization since late 1970s, China has grown steadily stronger. Are China and the United States on a collision course? Is US new Asia Pacific as a "pivot" or "rebalancing" is to contain China? or can they cooperate to bring permanent peace not only in the region but in world? Where does Japan, the world's second largest economic power, fit in this frame? Japan has maintained its alliance with the United States, while also developing a more independent direction; but it does not wish to see the region dominated by China. Tensions have continued throughout the early twenty-first century in relation to both Taiwan and Korea. Are these tensions likely to result in war at some point? In Southeast Asia the various states have faced numerous "nation building" challenges, none more so than Indonesia.

2. Many groups oppose the authority of the existing states, and these tensions often spill over into the international arena. Throughout Asia Pacific one can also observe the expanding presence of regional and global organizations. The usual characterization of "Asia Pacific," includes East Asia and the Western powers of the Pacific (Australia, United States, Canada and New Zealand). East Asia can be separated into Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia. Northeast Asia covers China including Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, North Korea, South Korea, Russia (Far East or Pacific Russia) and Mongolia. Southeast Asia includes Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, East Timor and Vietnam. Except

East Timor, Southeast Asian countries are all members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Whereas New Zealand and Australia are the major powers of the South Pacific, the entire Pacific islands region comes within a definition of Asia Pacific. Together with Australia and New Zealand, the independent and self-governing island states constitute the Pacific Islands Forum, the prominent island states are Papua New Guinea and Fiji. The Pacific seaboard countries of Latin America i. e Chile, Mexico and Peru are members of APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation). India also interacts with Asia Pacific in various ways.

Historical Context

3. The concept of Asia Pacific dates back to the 1960s, as a means of linking East Asia to the wider Pacific region duly promoted by countries like United States, Japan and Australia. “Asia Pacific” highlights the Asian dimension in a way that “Pacific region” does not. US support has been a major factor in enabling the concept to become established. However, from a political perspective the United States cannot portray itself as an Asian power but its extensive involvement in the Pacific justifies describing it as part of Asia Pacific. Pacific-oriented Western countries such as Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, although they do not carry the weight of the United States, have similar reasons for supporting the construct. Japan an important factor behind its support was that while the concept provided a justification for continued US involvement in East Asian affairs, this also meant that if tensions arose in US-Japanese relations, there could be a possibility for defusing such tensions in wider regional settings.

4. As the term “ Pacific region” does not contain any specific reference to Asia, the major alternative regional construct has been “ East Asia,” which excludes Western powers such as the United States. From the late 1980s, the main advocate for same was former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tun Mahathir Mohamad. In 1989, although Malaysia became a member of Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), Mahathir’s preference was however, for an East Asian Economic Grouping or Caucus. The “ East Asian” approach received a fillip at the time of the Asian economic crisis in 1997, with the subsequent emergence of members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, together with Japan, China and South Korea (ASEAN + 3). In December 2005, a new grouping, known as the East Asia Summit, emerged following a meeting in Kuala Lumpur.

5. The major powers of Asia Pacific i. e: United States, China and Japan are particularly engaged in Northeast Asia. The other significant subregion is the Southeast which include Australia, Indonesia, Russia, Taiwan and N & S Korea. Regional organizations play a significant role in giving substance to the Asia Pacific concept. While the focus in this research is on the contemporary era and the recent past but few of the issues we will discuss, have deep historical roots. Hence it is appropriate to provide an overview of the historical context in terms of the following phases:

- a. The era of traditional civilizations.
- b. The era of imperialism.
- c. Traditional Civilizations (1945-1989 period).

Era of Traditional Civilizations

6. Contemporary Asia Pacific system of states is based on the Westphalian model developed in Europe in 1648. The shift to this model resulted from the impact of Europeans in the region, but the Westphalian system was not the prevailing model historically. China was the dominant force in Northeast Asia, developed as a distinctive civilization over a period of thousands of years. Although there were periods of conflict and division within China, however, the Chinese civilization made significant contributions in the development of bureaucracy (the mandarin system), science and technology, arts, agriculture and industry, commerce and philosophy. The writ of the Chinese Emperors ran wide, as many leaders of countries like Korea and Vietnam were also required to pay tribute to the Emperor. China had the dominant cultural influence in the development of Japan, which was following a policy of isolating itself from the outside world as much as possible. Hence Japanese civilization developed along its own lines; Japanese rulers did not pay tribute to China. In the Chinese view of the world, people living beyond its civilisation influence were characterized as barbarians. In Southeast Asia the situation was even more complex. No single empire dominated Southeast Asia, while China has an important influence in the northern part of Southeast Asia, particularly in Vietnam, Indian civilization also had a major impact. The term “ Indo-China” originally covered the whole of mainland Southeast Asia and reflected the dual influences. Hinduism and Buddhism in Southeast Asia derive originally from India. Cambodia (Angkor) was one Southeast Asian empire where the influence of Indian civilization was strong. The survival of Bali as a predominantly Hindu island within a largely Muslim Indonesia is a reflection of earlier Indian influence. Traders

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brought Islam to maritime Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia, and Southern Philippines) from about the thirteenth century.

The Era of Imperialism

7. The extensive European involvement in the region begins from the fifteenth century, the Europeans were particularly interested in trade so they established cooperative relationships with local rulers, and the missionaries also became involved in some areas. To achieve political control, European access was through mercantile companies such as the Dutch United East India Company (VOC), they also established Trading centres and forts in some regions. Portugal was the earliest European power to become involved in the region, the Spice Islands (later known as the Moluccas or Maluku), Malacca (in modern Malaysia) and Macau (China) were important Portuguese centres. Spain extended influence in the Philippines only.. Netherlands took control of Netherlands East Indies (modern Indonesia). The Dutch were the only outsiders who had access to Japan after 1639, with a settlement at Nagasaki. The British and French were active in the so-called Far East. The greatest external pressure on the existing international system in East Asia occurred during the nineteenth century in different forms, in Northeast Asia the imperialist powers generally sought domination without much emphasizes on the acquisition of territory, to ensure the achievement of strategic and economic objectives. The changing situation was most obvious in relation to China especially from the time of the Opium War (Britain and China-1842), China was forced to make a number of concessions to Western powers through a series of unequal treaties (e. g Hong Kong). Western powers established spheres of influence in different regions of China. The

United States pursued an open-door policy with the aim of giving all external powers equal access to China. Russia put the most emphasis on territorial expansion at China's expense.

8. In Northeast Asia, Japan was also subjected to strong Western pressures, but the outcome there was very different from that in China. Japan took various steps and strengthen its political and economic system resisted Western influence and achieved remarkable success in this respect. By the end of the nineteenth century Japan had joined the Western powers in making gains at China's expense and was also competing strongly with Russia in Northeast Asia. Following its successes in the Sino-Japanese war of 1894-1895 and Russo-Japanese war of 1904-1905, Japan acquired Taiwan and brought Manchuria predominantly under her influence. In the 1930s and early 1940s the main territorial threat to China was from Japan. In 1931 Japanese forces seized Manchuria and then war broke out between Japan and China in 1937, first in the north, extending subsequently to large eastern parts of China. From 1941 this conflict became the China theatre of the Pacific War. As compared with Northeast Asia, in Southeast Asia there was a stronger emphasis on territorial expansion by the Western powers. Japan did not become involved in this territorial expansion until the Pacific War. As previously indicated, up until the early nineteenth century the Western powers in Southeast Asia had established some centers and limited areas where they had political control. During the course of the nineteenth century there was greater competition among those powers, which encouraged the acquisition of colonies in certain regions. The main changes in Southeast Asia involved Britain, France and Netherlands. Britain was the colonial power

in Burma (Myanmar), Singapore, Malay Peninsula and northern Borneo. France acquired Indochina i. e Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos. Netherlands expanded its control in the entire archipelago of Indonesian. In addition to these European powers, United States became a colonial power when it got hold of the Philippines from Spain after the latter's defeat in the Spanish-American War (1898-1899). In the Southeast Asia, Thailand was the only country, escaped colonial rule due to the country's location as a buffer zone between the British and French spheres in mainland Southeast Asia. During the early twentieth century, nationalist movements developed as a challenge to Western rule in a number of Southeast Asian countries. The most significant movements were witnessed in Indonesia and Vietnam but the Japanese expansion into the region during the Pacific War posed the greatest challenge to the existing colonial system. Japan occupied all of the British, Dutch, and US possessions in Southeast Asia. In Indochina Japan had the cooperation of the Vichy French government, Thailand Indonesia and Burma cooperated and worked with Japan as a means of advancing own goals. With Japan's defeat in 1945, clearly the re-imposition of the previous colonial system would be no easy task.

Cold War Era (1945-1989)

9. During the post Cold War era, the international relations in Asia Pacific included the new international roles of China, Japan and the United States. The significant developments during the era were the Cold War conflicts in the 1950s and 1960s, Southeast Asia's decolonization, Sino-Soviet conflict, Sino-American rapprochement, the emergence of Southeast Asian regionalism and postcolonial conflicts in Southeast Asia. To appreciate the

significance of these events and their interrelationships it will be helpful to focus on these issues in a chronological sequence:

- a. The late 1940s laid the foundations for international relations in Asia Pacific for the entire post war period.
- b. The US occupied defeated Japan from 1945 to 1951, intended on democratizing and demilitarizing Japan so as to ensure that Japan would never again become a threat.
- c. By 1947, the United States had shifted tack due to changes occurring at a global level.
- d. The beginning of Cold War shifted US focus towards containment of communism, specifically of the Soviet Union
- e. In 1951, the United States concluded a lenient peace treaty with Japan to make her an ally in that struggle.
- f. After the mutual security treaty, Japan joined the emerging US alliance system. The developments in Japan were consistent with US Cold War objectives; however, developments in China were more of a setback.

CHAPTER II

Factors Influencing Policies in the Region

1. During World War II, the United States had expected China to play a major role as a replacement for Japan in East Asia, which also provided the basis for China to become permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. However, with the defeat of Japan, full-scale civil war resumed

between the communists and nationalists in China. Despite United States support to the nationalists, who had already been weakened by the war with Japan, the communists extended their political support in many areas and by late 1949 controlled the whole of the mainland. The People's Republic of China (PRC) was proclaimed on 1 October 1949; undoubtedly this development and subsequent Sino-Soviet alliance created in 1950, had major implications for the international dynamic in Asia Pacific. The United States construed the emergence of the PRC as a fillip for the Soviet Union. The Chinese revolution had received little support from Stalin, who maintained diplomatic relations with the nationalist government until 1949, the Sino-Soviet tensions remained hidden till there was an open conflict by the 1960s.

2. In the beginning of Cold War era the Southeast Asia confronted with issues related to the decolonization as under:

a. With the defeat of Japan, the two colonial powers most intent on restoring their pre war positions were France and the Netherlands. In both cases conflict ensued with the relevant nationalist movements.

b. In Vietnam, war between France and the communist-led Viet Minh (1946 to 1954). The Viet Minh's communist orientation made it suspect in the eyes of the United States.

c. US perceived the success of the Viet Minh would bolster the position of China and the USSR in the region.

d. In Indonesia the conflict was a contest between colonialism and nationalism, and by 1949 the Netherlands had conceded independence.

e. In 1946, Philippines got independence from the United States.

f. Britain granted independence to Burma (Myanmar) in 1948.

3. During the 1950s and 1960s, Japan gradually emerged once again as a major economic power in Asia Pacific. It relied on the United States for defence. There were significant US forces in Japan, and Okinawa remained under US control until 1972. Japan gave low-level support to the United States during the Korean, and Vietnam Wars. There was a mismatch between Japan's growing economic strength and its very limited international political role. In Southeast Asia issues of decolonization continued and from the Vietnamese communist perspective the Vietnam War was simply a continuation of the earlier struggle against the French for independence. Malaya got independence from Britain in 1957, latter in 1963, Singapore and the northern Borneo territories joined in the new federation of Malaysia. This development provoked a conflict and Sukarno, Indonesia's first president, saw the new federation as a neo-colonial scheme to perpetuate British influence, he mounted an anti-Malaysia campaign known as "Konfrontasi" (Confrontation) which ended after the coup in September 1965 by Indonesian military, which emerged under new President Suharto was strongly anticommunist and hundreds of thousands of alleged communists and their sympathizers were massacred. These changes in Indonesia brought an end to Confrontation and prepared the way for a new regionalism when the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was

founded in 1967. Apart from Indonesia, the founding members were Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. This also strengthened the relations among the non-communist countries in Southeast Asia as well.

Confrontation Between US and China

4. In the 1950s and 1960s international relations in Asia Pacific also witnessed direct confrontation between United States and China in the context of the Korean War (1950-1953), which commenced with communist North Korea's attack on anticommunist South Korea on 25 June 1950. With UN authorization, US forces with the support from other countries, had come for the assistance of South Korea. However, instead of stopping at the dividing line between the two Koreas, the United States took the conflict into the north. China felt threatened, and entered the war. Moreover, sending of the US Seventh Fleet to the Taiwan Strait meant that Chinese communist forces could not liberate Taiwan from the nationalists. The PRC saw US protection of Taiwan as unwarranted interference in the Chinese civil war. From the Chinese perspective the United States was attempting "encirclement" of China. The PRC became the main focus of the US containment strategy in Asia Pacific

5. In the 1960s, the emergence of the Vietnam War also highlighted the Sino-US confrontation. The United States interpreted the conflict between Vietnamese communist forces and the anticommunist Saigon government from the perspective of its global strategy of containment. Both the USSR and China were seen as supporting the Vietnamese communists. It was believed that the defeat of South Vietnam would mean an extension of Chinese power. There was an important element of "power politics" in this

conflict and each country competed for influence in different regions of the world. In Vietnam, for example, China and the USSR did not engage in a cooperative endeavour, but instead vied for dominant influence. The fact that both powers espoused communism added an important ideological dimension to the conflict.

Sino-US rapprochement

6. During the 1970s and 1980s the most significant development in international relations was the emergence of the Sino-US rapprochement. The Nixon administration sought to achieve improved relations with both the communist powers i. e China and the USSR, thereby improving US leverage. China considered its conflict with the USSR, more threatening than its conflict with the United States. Improved US relations would enable China to focus its efforts on its issues with the USSR. This convergence in interests paved the way for a visit to China by President Richard Nixon in 1972. In the Shanghai Communiqué, as signed by the two sides, the United States recognized the “one China” principle, also maintained its interest in a peaceful resolution of the Taiwan issue. The US and the PRC establish formal diplomatic relations in 1979, US recognition of the Republic of China (Taiwan) ceased and the mutual security treaty also ended. Taiwan became more isolated, although the United States continued arms sales through the Taiwan Relations Act (1979). Apart from the changes in the US-China-Taiwan relationship, the effect of the Sino-US rapprochement also ended polarization in the region and allowed for greater fluidity in international relationships. There was added scope for regional countries to develop relations with both China and the United States and to pursue more independent policies. From

the US perspective the Sino-US rapprochement made withdrawal from the Vietnam conflict easier. It would have been much more difficult for the United States if it were presented as a boost for the major communist powers, and China in particular. In 1975 the Saigon government fell and Vietnam as a whole now came under communist rule, communist governments also emerged in Cambodia and Laos. The Khmer Rouge government in Cambodia was also strongly anti-Vietnamese. In 1978, Vietnam intervened and deposed the Khmer Rouge government. China supported the anti-Vietnamese resistance while the USSR backed Vietnam. The ASEAN countries and the United States also supported the opposition to Vietnam.

7. The greater fluidity in international relations in Asia Pacific following the Sino-US rapprochement had implications for Japan. The United States encouraged Japan to expand its international role but Japan remained cautious. Neighboring countries, particularly China and South Korea, were suspicious of any moves by Japan to expand its security role. Japan was active in the Group of 7 (world's major economic powers, known as G7) and expanded its links with Southeast Asia. However, Japanese strength could also lead to resentment in many countries. Japanese economic development provided a model for certain other East Asian countries to follow.

8. The end of the Cold War once again witnessed US main contest in Asia Pacific with China, although relationship had now been transformed with the achievement of rapprochement in 1972. In Asia Pacific the major developments relating to the end of the Cold War concerned the Soviet Union. Soviet-Japanese relations did not change significantly. Soviet-US

relations clearly changed at the global level but there were also implications in the North Pacific. Tensions relating to the opposing military deployments of the United States and the USSR in this region did ease at this time. While understanding the historical background helps to put recent developments in the international politics of Asia Pacific into context, it is constructive now to be aware of some of the key features of the polities of the region.

CHAPTER III

Regional Political and Economic System

Political Systems

1. Asia Pacific encompasses a broad range of political systems. First of all in relation to the major powers, both the United States and Japan have liberal democratic political systems; China has an authoritarian political system under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. Western powers such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand have liberal democratic principles. A number of the states in both Northeast and Southeast Asia are based on democratic principles. In Northeast Asia, South Korea and Taiwan have democratization since late 1980s. The Russian Federation (in the Russian Far East) has moved toward democratization since the collapse of the Soviet Union, but also retains some authoritarian features. In Southeast Asia the Philippines since independence, has followed a democratic model, except martial law under President Ferdinand Marcos (1972-1981). In Malaysia and Singapore, it is a democratic political system although in Malaysia the Malay-dominated Barisan Nasional has ruled since independence and under the People's Action Party, Singapore has been essentially a one-party state. Following Suharto's fall in May 1998, Indonesia too has moved in the

direction of democratization. Thailand, another Southeast Asian state dominated by the military, has been engaged in democratization since the early 1990s. Cambodia under “strong man” Hun Sen is democratic in form but also employs authoritarian practices. East Timor achieved independence in 2002 on the basis of democratic institutions. Apart from China, there are communist-oriented authoritarian governments in North Korea, Vietnam, and Laos. While there have been moves toward reform in Vietnam, Myanmar is the main instance of a military-dominated regime in the region, and Brunei is ruled by a sultanate.

Economic Systems

2. In terms of economic systems, most Asia Pacific countries are broadly capitalist. Even within a predominantly capitalist economy, government enterprises can play a key role in some situations. The two major economic powers of Asia Pacific are the United States and Japan; the United States has the world’s largest GDP, Japan has the second largest. Both countries have advanced industrial economies, and the United States is also a major agricultural producer. China is an emerging economic power, with a significant private sector. The Japanese version of capitalism is much more controlled than the US version. In Northeast Asia South Korea and Taiwan, two of the “newly industrializing countries” (NICs), are close to the Japanese model. Australia and Canada are closer to the United States in approach; both countries are also leading agricultural producers. New Zealand is a smaller version yet.

3. In Southeast Asia, Singapore has the most advanced economy. Prior to the Asian economic crisis of 1997, Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia

experienced significant economic growth through the development of their manufacturing sectors. All three were adversely affected by the economic crisis, with Indonesia most so. The newer members of ASEAN i. e Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia and also newly independent East Timor have essentially Third World economies. Brunei is a small oil-rich state. Vietnam and Laos have communist-style centralized economies, but with reforms enabling the private sector to play an increasingly important role. In Southeast Asia, North Korea has experienced significant economic decline.

US Economic Interest in the Region

4. US is also pursuing an aggressive economic and trade agenda in Asia to demonstrate economic leadership in the region and shape the agenda for future years to accelerate regional economic integration. US is taking a three-pronged approach to driving successful engagement with the region: securing ratification of the U. S.-Korea Free Trade Agreement, achieving milestone progress on the Trans-Pacific Partnership negotiations and making the APEC more effective. Presently, the 21 APEC economies, with approximately 2.7 billion consumers, purchase almost 60 percent of U. S. goods exports. Seven of the United States' top fifteen trading partners are in APEC. Strong Asian participation in APEC, the WTO, and the G-20 reflects the increasing importance of Asian economies and their centrality to strengthening the multilateral trading system and sustaining US economic recovery. The continued integration of the U. S with APEC economies, which will benefit workers, consumers, and businesses in the region and create jobs in the United States. The region is essential to the success of President Obama's National Export Initiative, and his goal of doubling U. S. exports by

2015. In strategic terms, it will underscore our commitment to prosperity and security in the Asia Pacific and fortify our leadership role and influence in the region.

5. Another important pathway to expanding U. S. economic engagement in Asia, and increasing U. S. exports to dynamic Asian markets, is the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement, or TPP. The nine APEC economies involved Australia, Brunei, Chile, Malaysia, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, Vietnam, and the United States, represent almost 40 percent of APEC's total goods and services exports. With these economies US is negotiating a new template for a high-quality, high ambition, 21st century trade agreement. This is a strategic agreement that is central to enhancing the 21st century supply chain and new economies.

CHAPTER IV

U. S. Strategic Framework and General Approach in the Asia Pacific

1. Recent trends appear to indicate that the Asia-Pacific will become the centre of attention in the 21st century. Whether the 21st century remains " American" or becomes " Pacific" is a matter of debate, but one can still argue in defence of the broader " Asia-Pacific century." The security role of the United States and the ascent of China to superpower status are likely to be a central focus of the world. The regional security is not by simply looking at what states do in Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia, or East Asia as a whole but it also depends on the activities of great powers inside and outside East Asia, and relations among powerful states, especially China, Japan, Russia, and the United States; these states are also directly involved as members of

a regional security regime, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). One may argue that the United States is not an East Asian state because it is external to the region, but at the same it is believed that US involvement in the security calculus is must for the region as many of the East Asian states trust the United States more than they trust each other.

2. It is now becoming evident that America considers success in the 21st century is linked to its success of policy in Asia-Pacific region. As Secretary Clinton has said, “ much of the history of the 21st century will be written in Asia”. It is understood that the region’s influence is growing immensely and Asian nations are vital contributors of the global economy and their opinions and decisions have profound influence on addressing complex and emerging transnational challenges. Despite tremendous growth in the Asia-Pacific, the region still faces some of the most daunting challenges of the 21st century. North Korea and Myanmar remain alien to the region’s prosperity and continue to be considered the main cause for insecurity and instability. The most critical issues, which the world is facing today are the nuclear proliferation, unresolved territorial disputes, military competition, violent extremism, financial crises and ineffective governments. The growing demand over energy and natural resources also poses major risk in the region and demands collective action. Due to rapid emergence of transnational security risks and threats viz aviz US long-term national interests in the region. It is now becoming imperative for US to focuss her attention and work with her allies and partners in the region to address and meet these significant challenges. To remains true to its identity as a Pacific power and following a long history and commitment to Asia, The US

Administration has articulated a five-part framework for engagement in the Asia Pacific:

- a. Modernize and deepen alliances with Japan, Australia the Republic of Korea, Philippines and Thailand.
- b. Broaden engagement with important countries like Singapore Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, Mongolia, New Zealand and most notably India.
- c. With China, develop stable, comprehensive and predictable relationship.
- d. Engage and invest in the region's promising multilateral architecture.
- e. Pursue trade and economic strategy more aggressively.

3. United State is working to support the region's own efforts to promote democratic principles, freedom of religion and expression and protect human rights,. US is also advocating and trying hard for the restoration of democracies in countries like Fiji, Myanmar. Voicing to promote rule of law, good governance, and respect for human rights especially in China and Vietnam. The swiftness of US engagement in this getting more and more important region indicates the renewed emphasis on consolidating, developing and deepening partnerships, as US Secretary Clinton has articulated, " our forward-deployed diplomacy in Asia seeks to leverage these relationships to underwrite regional security, heighten prosperity, and support stronger democratic institutions and the spread of universal human rights in the Asia-Pacific region".

4. In number of areas, the region offers the United States tremendous opportunities, including forming new strategic partnerships and expanding